

LENIN'S HUMANITY

A paper presented by
PROFESSOR HOWARD L. PARSONS
at a
SYMPOSIUM ON LENIN
May 3, 1970 in New York City
with an
Opening Address by
WILLIAM L. PATTERSON

Auspices:
National Council of
American-Soviet Friendship

Participants

S Y M P O S I U M o n L E N I N

MR. GENNADI GERASIMOV

Commentator

Novosti Press Agency - U.S.S.R.

MR. GEORGI SKOROV

Senior Researcher

Institute of World Economics
and International Relations -
U.S.S.R.

PROF. BARROWS DUNHAM

Author and Professor of Philosophy
Formerly of Temple University

PROF. HOWARD L. PARSONS

Chairman, Department of Philosophy

Bridgeport University

MR. WILLIAM L. PATTERSON

Moderator of the Symposium

Note:

The National Council did not ask the participants to submit written papers at this informally conducted Symposium. We are sorry we can reproduce only the contribution made by Professor Parsons and the introductory remarks of the chairman, Mr. Patterson.

Lenin's Humanity

Much has been said of Lenin's theory, tactics, knowledge, skill, and foresight. I want to speak of his humanity. Certainly Lenin had a great mind for both theory and practice. But he also had a great heart. We must not forget this. For a mind without a heart is empty and can easily become inhuman. The heart feels love and hate, confidence and doubt, pride and shame, tenderness and indignation. It feels with joy the power of life. It feels with fear and resistance the power of death. But without those feelings, what has mind to do? For action follows from such feelings, and mind guides action.

When I speak of Lenin's humanity, I mean his human-heartedness, his feelings of love and hate, and all those other feelings born in man's struggle to create what is good and to destroy what is evil for him and his fellow-man. I mean his power to feel the feelings of others, to learn from them in that way, and to join his feelings to theirs in communication and common struggle.

As we look at the photographs of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov as a baby and a boy, and as we read about his family life, is there any doubt that he was loved, that he learned how to love in return, and that in this way his revolutionary passion to liberate mankind was first germinated and developed?

Lenin loved his mother and his father, who were warm-hearted parents and natural teachers. He loved his brothers and sisters, whose hearts and minds were open books to one another. The young Lenin responded with spontaneous sympathy toward the oppressed national minorities he saw as a youth. When he was a senior at the Gymnasium, he tutored a disadvantaged Chuvash free of charge three times a week for eighteen months.

Alexander, Vladimir's older brother, from whom he first learned about Marx, was his model. After Alexander was hanged by the tsarist government for his part in the attempted assassination of Tsar Alexander III, Lenin soon became engaged in protest actions against police persecution at Kazan University, and was imprisoned. He became convinced that only one road lay

before him. That was the road of revolution. It was not the road of revenge or anarchic destruction. It was a revolution for love -- not only for his brother, who had been executed, but for all oppressed people.

Lenin communicated his revolutionary fervor to others. Anna Ilyinichna wrote: "He would explain to me with great fervor and enthusiasm the fundamentals of Marx's theory and talk of the new horizons it opened. He seemed to radiate an optimistic confidence which was very catching."¹ Of the days of exile in Siberia, Krzhizhanovskaya said: "His busy, cheerful mode of living, full of inner meaning, acted as a stimulus, set the pace for all of us, kept us from lapsing into indolence."²

Lenin is sometimes viewed as a coldly scientific person or an ascetic. But many, including Krupskaya, give a different picture. "He was passionately fond of people," she reports.³ It gave him great pain to find even the slightest divergence between his views and those of Plekhanov, who had been so influential in his discovery of the revolutionary road.⁴ Moreover, Lenin was enormously happy with his chosen destiny. He smiled frequently, laughed heartily, and liked to sing and whistle to himself.⁵ What could have made this almost penniless man, homeless, hunted, and possessed of a small number of followers, so hopeful? What made him as bright-eyed and cheerful as a chickadee on the darkest winter day? He drew strength and hope from within and beyond himself -- from his dear remembered ones, from his comrades, and from the people of his country and other nations, in whom he placed a boundless trust.

From early in life Lenin had a feeling for the underprivileged. After his family moved to Samara, when Lenin was turning twenty, the young man got to know the peasants personally and made an extensive study of their conditions. In Shushenskoye, says Krupskaya, "a peasant took two hours to tell him how he quarreled with his kin because they did not treat him well at a wedding. Ilyich questioned him closely in an effort to familiarize himself with their life."⁶ He also lectured to a Marxist study-circle which included workers of the Samara railway depot.⁷

Everywhere Lenin went he made contact with the workers and common people. Gorky tells of how in Capri fishermen taught Lenin to hook the fish when his finger felt the line vibrating. "Cosi: drin, drin. Capisce?" they explained. "A second later he hooked a fish," Gorky says, "drew in and cried out with child-like joy and a hunter's excitement, 'Drin, drin!' The fishermen roared with laughter, gay as children, and nicknamed the fisherman: 'Signor Drin-Drin.' After he had gone away, they continued to ask: 'How is Signor Drin-Drin getting on? The tsar hasn't caught him yet?' One old Italian fisherman said of Lenin, "Only an honest man could laugh like that."⁸

We do not have to go beyond Lenin's fine, natural relation with Nadezhda Krupskaya to discover his feelings and hence his understanding toward women. In his relations to his mother and his sisters and his wife, we find no trace of prejudice or ambivalence, no sense of male pride or rivalry. He saw women, as he saw all common people, as persons capable of striving toward freedom. The young Lenin's initial feelings of equality with women were confirmed in his revolutionary struggles with his women comrades.

As Lenin's London landlady and many others recalled, Lenin loved children. Let the selfish, money-mad, cruel men of the world remember this! Let the exploiters of children--those who starve them, pen them up in poverty and filth, turn aside from their sickness, bind them in ignorance, and bomb and shoot them in cold blood--let those exploiters of children tremble before a revolution for the love of children!

And this iniquitous leader of the Bolshevik revolution--it was of him that Gorky wrote: "He caressed children with great care, with a light and tender touch."⁹

Two thousand years ago a revolutionary Jewish prophet declared that heaven is living like brothers and sisters; he put his arms around the children, laid his hands upon them, and said: Heaven belongs to such as these. Turning on the exploiters of children he said, It is better for you to have a millstone hung around your neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea!

This revolutionary was crucified by the state. But Lenin the revolutionary effected a revolution in his own lifetime. We must consider why.

Everyone, even his enemies, recognized Lenin's honesty and sincerity. Lenin had a strong feeling for reality. He wanted to draw close to it so that he could change it and shape it to meet the needs of people. He realized that knowledge is power and that the only way to get knowledge is honestly to face and probe concrete situations. Many persons have testified to Lenin's habit of mingling with all kinds of people and of questioning them carefully to draw out of them their observations and reflections on conditions. Here is one report:

When I walked into the office I referred to my part in the 1905 revolution. Lenin came up to me and said, 'Yes, comrade, but what are you doing for this revolution?' His face was not more than six inches away and his eyes were looking straight into mine. I spoke of my old days on the Moscow barricades, and took a step backward, But Lenin took a step forward, not letting go my eyes, and said again, 'Yes, comrade, but what are you doing for this revolution?' It was like an X-ray--as if he saw all my deeds in the last ten years. I couldn't stand it. I had to look down like a guilty child.¹⁰

Today we see Lenin before us, not more than six inches away, with his eyes looking straight into ours almost like a child in his directness and persistence. He is asking, "What are you doing for this revolution?"

It takes courage to face the reality of our social life, in all its complexity and ambiguity, its inhumanity and destructiveness. It takes still more courage to probe that reality for signs of promise and hope, and to begin to create a new reality with one's dreams, thoughts, and actions. Lenin had a feeling for the future, for what man might become. He had the courage to dream the tremendous dream of Marxism. "We should dream!" he wrote at the age of 32--dream of a mobilized army of revolutionaries who will "rouse the whole people to settle accounts with the shame and the curse of Russia."¹¹ Lenin excoriated those "realists" who

boasted of "their 'closeness' to the 'concrete'" but who in fact became the tails to money-grubbing unionism and terrorism.

Lenin not only had the deep human feelings necessary for a revolutionary--the love of people and the hate of all that oppresses them. He moved out from his own feelings to find the feelings of others. He communicated with them. He tried to understand them. He communicated his understanding to them. He tried to persuade them of his understanding and his proposals for change--not from afar but from their grasp of the realities of their own living situation. From there he tried to enlist and lead them in the revolutionary struggle for the liberation of people in Russia. This whole process is sometimes called materialist dialectics.

Lenin learned from others. In learning, he also taught and led them and helped them to become their own leaders.

Lenin experienced the full range of human feelings, from tenderness to indignation. Like a child--open, trusting, honest, unpretentious--he communicated with others, and elicited from them tenderness and indignation. But the expression of feeling, the communication of feeling one to another, are not enough. They may give temporary relief and a feeling of unity. But they do not change things. Mature social action is required for that. But social action comes up against obstacles--war, hunger, the exploitation of people on the land and in the factories and offices. Hence it requires direction against the enemies of the people and toward the liberation of the people. Marxism provides this direction. But it must be Marxism as a living, creative method, flexibly used by people to solve concrete problems. Marxism as dogma is dead. The written letter kills, but the spirit gives life.

Revolutions begin in these deep feelings of tenderness and indignation of people, communicated one to another. But they are carried through by action, united with revolutionary theory and guided by that theory.

Consider, for contrast, some of the views current in our country today with regard to revolution.

A number of young people, for example, feel that the expression of tenderness is sufficient to bring a transformation of society. Here, by a student of mine, is a description of such tenderness as experienced at the Vietnam Moratorium in Washington, November 15 of last year:

All comforts were given up; we slept on crowded church floors, waited on hour-long lines to use the bathroom or to eat. However, that was the whole beauty, the whole unity of the Moratorium. It was not only a three-day protest against the war, against the system, it was a three-day living experience of the ideal we were striving for. People were totally sharing totally together. Money had no meaning, for everything was operated on a socialistic basis. People for the most part were unkempt, without make-up, dressed in the same clothes for their whole stay. Yet people looked more beautiful than they ever had, for there was the glow of truth on their face and for a change they looked natural, like people.

At the Moratorium itself on Saturday things came to a culmination. Over half a million people were gathered passing out food and love. The spirit was one of true peace and the violence predicted by the news did not exist. The moratorium became the center of overflowing joy. There were hug-in's going on among hundreds. Everyone would start dancing in a circle and all of a sudden the people would start hugging each other. This was truly expressive of the love and peace that dominated the entire day. Also the hug-in's were an excellent way of fighting the cold. Hugging to fight the cold is the only type of fighting that should be done.

Now, as much as we all like to hug and be hugged, that is not the way to conquer hunger, poverty, war, and racial injustice. Lenin understood this in Russia when he criticized Tolstoy's nonpolitical Christian pacifism, and later when after the Bolshevik revolution he took to task the Don Juans.¹² As beautiful as it may be or seem, "panting on mattresses," as Mayakovsky

observed, will never smooth the road to socialism.¹³ Faced with this romantic view that if people will just love one another, if they will do their own thing, then the great gettin'-up morning of socialism will dawn--we must recall Lenin's warning: "The current popular conception...of the 'withering away' of the state undoubtedly means a slurring over, if not a negation, of revolution."¹⁴

Now consider those at the other extreme: those whose indignation against the injustices of the inhuman social order knows no bounds. Again I quote from a student of mine:

The greatest "excesses" of revolution in blood and tears, terror and chaos are the uppermost refinements of the culture and peaceable sentiment of all history before it. I worship revolution and fall down before its altars with the throbbing of ancient harmonies in my breast to the destruction of flesh before spring to consecrate the summer. What blood can a year yield without being drowned itself by another added year? In short Revolution is beyond criticism, beyond the confines of comparisons which mitigate its solutions--which rest upon naked strength in mind and body of water and blood.

This glorification of violence was an attitude and practice familiar to Lenin also. From his early youth he knew of the Narodniks and their tactics of individual terrorism. Like many, he worshipped the terrorist heroes; it was a struggle for him to abandon that way. But from the time of the death of his brother he opposed anarchism,¹⁵ and he rejected all forms of political thought not grounded in the industrial workers and in a proletarian, mass-based party that could bring down capitalism.

In the spirit of Lenin, let us analyze how the hug-in's and the smash-down's of our contemporaries are two-sided, dialectical events and how they reflect the social structure around them.

The hug-in--variously called love-in, be-in, etc.--expresses a basic human need that is dehumanized in the factories, offices, ghettos, and battlefields of capitalist society. It is a protest against such dehumanization. But it also carries over from bourgeois society the sensuous enjoyment and self-indulgence so intensively cultivated by press, radio, television, cinema, and other media. A capitalism whose surplus value requires an overseas outlet in colonialism and imperialist war has produced millions of white-collar and blue-collar workers who have surplus time. Capitalism with technology at its command moves into the surplus time it generates not only to advertize products and stimulate surplus buying but also to divert and entertain in a way that locks the readers and listeners into its system in their feelings and thoughts. In its engineered and "hidden persuasion," it thus appeals to the ever present needs of people--the needs for food, drink, clothes, rest, activity, pain-avoidance, sex, love, etc. It has a human source and content--otherwise it could not succeed. But it so manipulates these needs that people spend vast amounts of surplus time pursuing its values of food, drink, sex, love, etc. which like independent powers dance before their eyes in the living room television set and determine how they feel, think, and act. The name for this is fetishism.

One of these fetishes is love. I do not mean love is bad; on the contrary, without the right kind of love, we cease to be human. But the love which our social order--read capitalism, or those who dominate our lives and values--inculcates is a personal, interpersonal, mystical, narrow love which stops at the boundaries of two skins and fades away when mystical ecstasy fades away. Ergo the love of the hug-in is a genuine human need misshapen and manipulated to turn people away from the revolution of love. In the process it provides a new and profitable market for clothes, cosmetics, jewelry, literature, records, movies, new television serials, etc.

The smash-down of anarchism is an expression of an authentic human need and feeling. The need at the base is the need for human fulfillment--for dignity, for a sense of value in oneself and one's society. But in our society this need to be and feel human is systematically violated and frustrated. Moreover, the dominant

institutions of the society--economic, political, and military--are engaged in colossal and systematic violence. Is it difficult to understand why some persons, feeling their dignity daily outraged and seeing the atrocities of institutionalized violence, are impelled to violence in an attempt to change things? Of course some anarchists are pathological personalities; but many are sensitive idealists. Yet they do not see that in enacting the mindless, disorganized, leaderless pattern of violence of the system they can never bring it down because it possesses a monopoly on violence in the country.

Tenderness and indignation are valid human feelings. They give us a kind of information about ourselves and our world. Tenderness tells us there is something of human quality and value in the world--a person, a work created by a person or persons, a landscape or animal or tree--which we wish to cherish or care for. Indignation tells us that what we value as human is being threatened, torn down, or destroyed, and that we must do something to prevent that desecration of human value.

In Lenin's terms, the question is not: What is to be felt? It is: What is to be done? Here is where thought enters--an entrance that seems uncalled for to many Yankees who pride themselves on their pragmatism and their freedom from theory. But is it not plain that "without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement"?

I will not write you now a handbook for political practice. But let us remind ourselves and others that societies have not been radically and humanistically changed apart from a sound theory of how they are changed, a disciplined group of leaders, a focussing on and isolation of the enemy, the rallying of mass support around common progressive causes, and skillful political action. In this country now the life-and-death problems are war, poverty, pollution, racism, and the threat of fascism. These problems are always interlinked, as the government's prosecution of the Black Panthers clearly reveals. We must show people that these problems are interlinked. We must help to unite people in the struggle against them. In that struggle we must educate people as to their basic causes in capitalism.

Opening A Symposium On Lenin

Dear Honored Guests and Friends:

I greet you at this symposium on Vladimir Ilyich Lenin in the name of the National Council of American Soviet Friendship.

What a wonderful occasion this is. It represents a continuation of the splendid activities for which the Council has been responsible in its efforts to weld an undying friendship between two great peoples. I congratulate our Council. In its name we welcome those Soviet scholars who have come to discuss with Americans the "Challenge of Building Peace." Our honored guests are indeed guests of honor.

Other friends from abroad are here with us. They, too, have come to discuss the challenge of peace and to celebrate with Americans the one-hundredth anniversary of the greatest social scientist this country has known. Around the globe men, women and youth pause to do him honor.

Some rejoice on the soil of a new world, the foundation of which was laid under Lenin's leadership. They build on that soil a bulwark to human freedom under the guidance of the Party of Lenin. They are a family of nations, speaking varied languages, sons and daughters of that guardian of world peace, the Socialist Soviet Republics. Indeed, the entire Socialist world holds aloft the banner of Lenin.

People in the throes of bloody national liberation wars pause to pay tribute to the man whose call to the oppressed masses of the world fired them to revolutionary activities. They seek to shatter age-old colonialisms; they seek mastery of their own destinies. Despite the ruthless devastation of their villages, the barbarous murder of their families, they fight on with deathless courage. And they will win, for Leninism taught them that it is the people who will determine the future of mankind.

We meet today in that country where the screeching planes and flesh-searing napalm bombs dropped upon freedom-seeking peoples are manufactured. In this

land, our country, forty millions of black, brown, red and yellow human beings are forced to live in stinking ghetto slums into which those who rule have introduced every conceivable vice. It is here that millions of white men, women and children have been dehumanized through centuries of the preachment and practice of the myths of white superiority. They have failed to realize how profoundly the racist war against their multi-colored fellow citizens affects their lives and the peace of the world. They have not realized the restraint racism places on the fight for peace. This racism of the ruling class drives our country ever more sharply toward barbarism and savagery.

Do you remember that in 1918 Lenin spoke to us through an Open Letter to American Workers? Permit me to recall some words from that letter which apply to this historic hour. (I quote): "...the American revolutionary proletarians are destined precisely now to play an especially important role as irreconcilable foes of American imperialism, which is the newest, strongest and latest to participate in the world-wide slaughter of nations for the division of capitalist profits." (Close quotes) A few nights ago, as I listened to a man mad with power call for war, I thought how prophetic were Lenin's words. We have a revolutionary proletariat, but it is confused. Lenin's ideas can dispel that confusion. But it is not only our proletariat that is called upon by history to act against aggressive wars.

Leninism, the Marxism of this era, has transformed the world. "Precisely now" we in the United States are called upon to form a united front of black, white, brown, red and yellow in a nation now fragmented along the color line. We are called upon to unify the nation. While we meet, black youth in the ranks of the revolutionary Black Panther Party are being persecuted and done to death in all sections of this country. What do they want? They, too, want a new world where equality of rights and opportunities are dominant.

Under the banner of Marxism-Leninism a billion of the world's population have been liberated. That called for international solidarity. For us that means black-white unity on the domestic front. The main responsibility for its achievement rests on the shoulders of you who are white.

On this day, as we pay tribute to the monumental figure of Lenin, that act must be more than a gesture. It will be more than that if we pledge that this nation, conceived in slavery, shall now truly be dedicated to the proposition that equality of rights and human dignity shall prevail.

Our failure to fight consistently and on every front of human relations for our mutual interests has been of tremendous advantage to American reactionaries. We are commanded by history "precisely now" to smash the racist myths loosed by the ideologists of imperialism and to put an end to all so-called conspiracy trials. That is one road to peace. Our unity in struggle can alone provide proof of our acceptance of that historic task.

We must say to our honored guests that we will not fail history.

- William L. Patterson, Chairman

#

